

Recollections of Four British Economic Historians *

My native heath was Manchester and the dozen miles or so round about the city, and many, if not most, of two generations of economic historians have come from this area. George Unwin, the first man to occupy a University Chair of Economic History in this country, was born and spent his youth (and early manhood) in Stockport: Eileen Power came from Altrincham, about the same distance on the other side of the town: C.R. Fay sprang from Manchester itself: A.P. Wadsworth came from Rochdale: Arthur Redford from Failsworth: G.N. Daniels from Swinton. It is true that Clapham belonged to the other side of the Pennines but he had some associations with Manchester: I once pointed out to him the spot in King Street when a relative of his — an uncle I think — had run a high-class jeweller's shop. Two others of whom I shall have something to say, J.L. Hammond and R.H. Tawney, though not Lancastrians by birth, spent a good deal of their working lives in Manchester, writing extensively for and helping to shape the policy of the *Manchester Guardian*.

It is worth observing that most of the authentic Mancunians were of humble origin: Daniels' father was a collier, Redford's a textile-machinist, Unwin's mother and Sir William Ashley's father both worked for the same firm of hatmakers. Incidentally, my own great-grandfather was a small master-hatter. His father had left the family trade to serve in the Peninsular War and when he came back found

* When I was appointed to the Chair of Economic History in the University of Exeter in 1964 I thought it would be beneficial for my students if they could have the opportunity to hear leading historians from other universities both in Britain and abroad. Accordingly I encouraged them to set up a student Economic History Society with as president a distinguished economic historian. For the session 1965-66 they invited Professor Thomas Southcliffe Ashton (1889-1968), who had recently retired from the London School of Economics, where he had taught me, to be their president. He came to Exeter on 29 April 1966 to deliver his presidential address in which he talked about four economic historians he had known: William Ashley, George Unwin, J.L. Hammond and R.H. Tawney. This paper, which seemed to deserve a wider audience, was the result.

employment as Governor of the House of Industry in Ashton-under-Lyne, a post the resounding title of which was hardly matched by the remuneration attached to it. But my grandfather became a Chartered Accountant and was made Actuary of the Ashton Trustee Savings Bank, a post to which my father succeeded. I was thus deprived of the privilege of working-class ancestry by which Unwin, Daniels and Redford set great store. Worse still, on my mother's side, I came of master cotton-spinners. But I mustn't run on about my own forebears. George Unwin was appointed to the Chair at Manchester in 1911 after I had graduated and gone to teach English and history at a school in Dublin. So, alas, I can't claim to have been a pupil of his in the ordinary sense. And though I threw up my teaching post after a few months and returned to Manchester to live on my wits — lecturing for the Free Trade Union and researching with Professor S.J. Chapman — I saw little of Unwin at this time. In 1912 I moved to Sheffield where for the following seven years I lived a strenuous life teaching the bit of economic history that was included in the curriculum of the University and more in W.E.A. tutorial classes in various parts of South Yorkshire and as far afield as Grimsby, six days and, during the war, seven days a week.

I was very happy working under Douglas Knoop. But when the war ended he told me that, in my own interest, I ought to look for another job. He himself had only a lectureship. But it was not for that reason that I left Sheffield for Birmingham. In the little time I had had for research I had been working on the history of iron and steel in Sheffield. The salary offered by Birmingham was lower than my income at Sheffield but I thought that the post would enable me to get to know something about the iron industry of the West Midlands — and especially Coalbrookdale — and that it would be good for me to work under the distinguished economic historian, William Ashley. In the first supposition I proved to be right, in the second in error.

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Friends in Birmingham think I am not fair to Ashley. But before passing any judgment let me outline the main facts of his career, about which you can read for yourselves in the biography written by his daughter. He was born in 1860, the son of a journeyman-hatter, got a scholarship to Balliol, when he came under the influence of Arnold Toynbee, and then visited Germany to absorb the teaching of Wagner

and Schmoller. From 1888 to 1892 he was Professor of Political Economy at Toronto and from then to 1901 Professor of Economic History at Harvard — the first professor of the subject in the English speaking world. His best works were written at this time: *The early history of the English woollen industry* appeared in 1887; *The introduction to English economic history and theory* was written between 1888 and 1893. After Ashley had graduated at Oxford he had applied for fellowships at four different colleges — unsuccessfully. At All Souls, to use the words of his daughter, he 'supposed himself to have been gravely handicapped by what might be held to be his social disadvantages'. And at yet another college 'the dons had rejected the recommendations of the external examiners because they did not think him the sort of man they wanted for their type of student'. At a fifth attempt in 1885, however, he was elected to a Fellowship at Lincoln, a college that was perhaps less obsessed by social distinctions than the others, for a little later Lincoln was to take in as students two men of working-class origin from the Manchester area — George Unwin and Ernest Barker. In the *American Journal of Economic History* for 1955 some previously unpublished letters of Ashley to Brentano are printed, in one of which Ashley said he had decided to apply for the Chair of Political Economy at Oxford made vacant by the death of Thorold Rogers in 1890 and asked for Brentano's support. Ashley was then only thirty years old and perhaps it was his youth and not his social origin that explains his lack of success this time.

However, his desire to get back to England, if not to Oxford, was gratified eleven years later. In 1901 the new University of Birmingham, under the powerful influence of Joseph Chamberlain, brought him to occupy the newly-created Chair of Commerce. It meant that Ashley became economic adviser to Chamberlain and spent a good deal of his time in propaganda for Tariff Reform. There is no need to suppose that he changed his political allegiance in order to obtain the Chair. In a letter to Brentano written in 1913 he said: 'I was brought up a strong Liberal and many of my intimate friends are strong Liberals: but since I began to care for Social Reform under Toynbee's influence (1882) I have been indifferent towards the claims of the Liberal party just because the party has never, in any deep sense, been fundamentally the party of social reform'.

Brentano was a strong Liberal in the widest sense of the word and a strong Free Trader. He cannot have been glad to hear this from Ashley. Brentano was a magnificent figure and a most attractive man — fully

representative of the best type of continental scholarship, which disappeared, I think, with the coming of the First World War. When peace was restored he was the first German scholar to be welcomed to England, to lecture at the University of Manchester. In 1931 when I visited Munich I tried to see him again but he was seriously ill and died the same year.

Ashley must not, then, be accused of any political duplicity. The chief reason for my finding it hard to like him was his preoccupation with social status, his exaggerated respect for rank and success and a morbid anxiety to hide the facts of his own humble origin. When I applied for the post at Birmingham I was called for an interview on a Saturday afternoon and told to wait in Ashley's room. He came in a few minutes later, said 'Good afternoon', sat down opposite me, fixed me with his eyes for a full minute, sighed and then said, 'You are not the man I expected to see'. Then, after another silence, came his first question — 'What's your father?' I replied that he was the manager of a Trustee Savings Bank. A few other questions followed, none of them about either my university career or my research, and none (I must say in fairness) about my politics — and then he told me I was appointed. I think the reason I got the post was that the man he wanted had suddenly withdrawn and that the new term was to open within a month.

My work at Birmingham was relatively light. I took over from Ashley his elementary course in economic history, conducted a mass meeting that was called a seminar once a week and was responsible for the Industrial Certificate Department — initiated by Neville Chamberlain — which was attended by wage-earners for three days a week, taking courses in political economy, politics, history, English literature and elementary science — all of which I enjoyed. At my first lecture to the Industrial Certificate Department students — 25 working men and women — I had got nicely going when Ashley walked in, in cap and gown, sat down in the middle of the front row, folded his arms and stayed to the end. The students were expected to do written work at home each week. But the books for the course had not yet arrived so I told them to take out their family Bibles, read Genesis and set down anything they found of economic interest in it. Ashley seemed satisfied and left me alone after that.

There was formality in the conduct of the Commerce Faculty. We had to appear at Faculty meetings in cap and gown and stand behind our chairs until Ashley came in. The early meetings were taken up with applications from ex-servicemen for partial remission of the examina-

tion requirements. We considered one who had remained in the ranks for three years. Without further questioning, Ashley said 'Three years in the Army without taking a Commission — Application refused'. He set great store by military command. Communications in the department were nearly always by letter. J.G. Smith, who then held the post of Assistant Professor and Sub-Dean of the Faculty, received one saying, 'Dear Sub-Dean, Kindly send me the names of six or eight of the students who have served with rank not below that of Major: Lady Ashley and I would like to invite them to tea on Sunday'. Smith carefully selected eight of the biggest twerps — all of them I think Lieut-Colonels. Two or three times in the two years we were in Birmingham my wife and I were invited to tea, when Ashley entertained us by singing and reading passages from Stephen Leacock, whose works he greatly admired. But though we lived only five minutes' walk away he never visited our flat.

I know I upset him once or twice. On one occasion I went with him to the Chamber of Commerce and on the way there he enjoined caution and a certain amount of 'humbug'. But when a member told me too bluntly how I ought to deal with the trade unions I reacted just as bluntly. At another time Ashley was invited to lunch with Neville Chamberlain and I was asked to join them after lunch. I arrived just as they had lighted their cigars and Chamberlain reached across the table for a box and said, 'Have a cigarette, Ashton'. Immediately, I replied 'No, thanks, I'll smoke my pipe' and lighted up in the Conservatory without first asking permission. I know my lack of good manners offended Ashley.

He very rarely, if ever, mentioned economic history to me. When I once told him I was spending the vacation on the Boulton and Watt records he merely observed, 'You are wasting your time. They have been sucked dry'. I often reflect on what they have yielded since then to many scholars.

In 1921 I had a letter from Unwin, whom I had first got to know as a friend, when he came to give a lecture in Sheffield and stayed the night with us. The letter said they were looking for a Senior Lecturer in Economics at Manchester and asked if I would like the appointment. I replied 'Yes' but didn't mention the matter to anyone. I expected to see the vacancy advertised and to have to make written application. It was an entire surprise, therefore, when a week or two later I got a letter saying that I had been appointed and the same day notice of this appeared in the *Manchester Guardian*. I went to see Ashley at once

but found he had seen the notice in the press and was — understandably — angry that I hadn't told him in advance. I tried to explain the situation, without, I am afraid, much success. Ashley coldly reminded me that the University of Birmingham had a claim on my services until 29 September and though I told him I should never think of leaving until I had seen my successor installed, we parted under a cloud. Some years later, however, he sent me a friendly letter to Manchester.

Shortly before I left Birmingham Ashley had suffered a disappointment. When Sir Oliver Lodge retired from the post of Principal of the University, Ashley, as Vice-Principal, took over the duties and fully expected to succeed to the office. He spoke openly about it and discussed with Smith the changes that must be made in the Department when he became Principal. Actually the post went to Grant-Robertson. Whether the Chamberlains, whose interests Ashley had furthered for so many years, failed to give him their support, one cannot know. But there can be no doubt about the severity of the blow. Sensibly he returned to scholarship and produced his book on *The bread of our forefathers* in 1925, when he retired to Canterbury and found solace as a lay reader in the Church to which he had always been devoted. He was active also in the founding of the Economic History Society and had the honour of being its first President.

I should be sorry if the trivial incidents I have recorded were taken to detract from the merits of Ashley as a man. He had firm religious and political convictions but did not allow these to intrude on personal relations. During the last war I met his younger brother, Sir Percy Ashley, who told me how in the early years of the century, he and William went together on a holiday to Betys-y-Coed. William had a room on the ground floor where he sat writing his book putting the case for Tariff Reform; Percy on the first floor was at work on his volume on Tariff Treaties, the conclusion of which told for Free Trade. Whenever either of them was at a loss for a point or a date he rapped on the wall for the other to come to his aid. In view of the political acrimony to which the Tariff controversy gave rise in the country at large, it is a pleasing picture.

Ashley's preoccupations with politics and university administration prevented his doing very much in the way of scholarship during what should have been his most productive years. He never created a 'school' or gathered disciples. His achievement as an economic historian might have been far greater if he had resisted these distractions.

His chief weakness as a man, however, was his concern about social position. On a page of his commonplace book in 1912 Tawney remarked on a man whose name is not set down, he 'is a recluse and lives in a terrible state of apprehension lest his origin should be discovered. When I see success gained at this price, I feel inclined to use the beautifully mild irony of the New Testament: "Verily, they have their reward".'

I don't want to suggest that Ashley's case was as bad as this. But if he had openly avowed his parentage and taken pride in it — as Unwin and Ernest Barker did — he would have won the respect of all whose respect is worth having.

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My chief reason for wanting to go to Manchester was to be with Unwin. I had attended one brief course of his in the evenings in 1912 and as I have said, he had stayed a night with us in Sheffield in 1915 or 1916 when I got him to lecture to the Sociological Society on 'The growth of towns'. Such hopes as I had of doing a little teaching in economic history at Manchester were soon dispelled. When I arrived, Daniels said to me 'Your job is to teach currency and public finance' — and this I did, not very fruitfully, for 23 years. I was soon made aware of the chasm that in Manchester, as in other Universities, divided the economists from the historians. Daniels and I were approached about writing the history of local government in Manchester. The historians vetoed it. There was a course on the history of economic organisation — one hour a week — for Commerce students. In a year when Redford felt overworked and it was suggested, with his good will, that I might take it for a single session, the historians were outraged — even though it was in our own faculty and not in the Arts faculty — so nothing came of it.

But it is of Unwin and not of myself that I am trying to speak. His father was a railway clerk who took over the Daw Bank Vaults, a small public house in Stockport. Unwin was the eldest of six children and for some years lived with his uncle, who kept the village inn at Pott Shripley, a few miles from Stockport. At the age of 13 he got a job as office boy with Carringtons, the firm of hatmakers for whom his mother had worked. His early intellectual interests were stimulated by attendance at the Unitarian Chapel and the Stockport Literary Society. But he owed most to his employer for whom he wrote speeches and letters

to the press. In 1890, when he had reached the age of 20, his uncle, who was a schoolmaster in Cardiff, suggested that he should compete for a scholarship at the University College there: Unwin was successful but the £20 a year that the scholarship yielded meant that he had to live for three years on a minimum of subsistence and it was to this that Unwin attributed his frail constitution in later life. In 1893, he gained a classical scholarship at Lincoln College, Oxford, where he remained for four years, taking a First in Greats and winning the Bishop Fraser Scholarship which enabled him, at the age of 27, to spend six months in Berlin. After returning to London, he worked for a time on the history of craftsmen in the felt-hat industry — again in conditions of acute poverty. But in 1899 he became Secretary to the cross-bench statesman, Leonard Courtenay, to whom he had been introduced by the Webbs. Courtenay, who was strongly opposed to the Boer War, had a formative influence on Unwin's political thought and remained a life-long friend. In 1908 Unwin was made Lecturer in Economic History at Edinburgh and in 1910 obtained the post of Professor at Manchester — at a salary, I believe, of £400 a year.

It isn't easy to summarise Unwin's thought and teachings. His political ideas were drawn largely from T.H. Green, William James and, towards the end of his life, R.M. MacIver, whose book on *Community* provided him with a word he often used, to indicate the small, voluntary unit which, in his view, was the seed-bed of all social development. It was not, however, in political philosophy that he was to make his mark but in realistic, historical studies, enlivened throughout by references to religion, metaphysics, politics, economic theory, Aesop's Fables and plain common sense. As Tawney wrote of him: '...it was as a dealer in unexpected ideas, rather than as a specialist in historical technique that he laid a spell upon his pupils and made his most characteristic contributions to the subject'. And again: 'The puritan in him rebelled against an interpretation of history which assigned a prominent role to the State as a factor in economic progress, the democrat against doctrines which confided popular destinies to the care of benevolent authority, the sceptic against the suggestion of miracles of social organisation to be performed by an enlightened patriotism'.

Unlike Ashley, who set store on the Honorary Doctorate conferred on him by the University of Berlin, Unwin reacted strongly against the teaching of Schmoller. He had at one time served in the Volunteers but, whether before or after his contact with Courtenay, he became a pacifist. Naturally this led to association with people like Keir Hardy

and Bertrand Russell and during and after the First World War he was a member of such bodies as the Union of Democratic Control and the Fellowship of Reconciliation: 'I am still organising lectures for that miscreant, Bertrand Russell [he wrote during the war] and going about in a sneaking way insinuating the subversive principles of the Sermon on the Mount at Methodist Colleges and other unlikely places'.

When, at the end of the war, in a moment of forgetfulness, the University rejected an applicant for admission to its staff on the ground that he had been in prison as a conscientious objector, Unwin placed his resignation of the Chair in the hands of the Vice-Chancellor. But though he thus got a reputation as a member of the Left, his opposition to other activities of the State brought him into conflict with the Webbs and the Fabians as a whole. Unlike most of us at Manchester, he was opposed to Women's Suffrage: women, he held, were not ready for the vote and, as things were, there was already too much emotion in politics. During the war, he wrote a vigorous letter to the *New Statesman* in opposition to proposals for Family Endowment — Tawney was with him for a time — on the ground that they meant interference by the State with the fundamental voluntary organisation — the family. When there was a proposal to remove the statue of Prince Albert from the central position in the city, opposite the Town Hall, Unwin joined with Tories in opposing it: it would, he held, be a betrayal of what Manchester had stood for. When I told him about an aristocratic acquaintance who had been to see the Home Secretary about the number of foreigners he saw in the streets of London and wanted their exclusion, I expected a reaction of strong disapproval from Unwin. He gently reminded me that communities of Hansards, Lombards, Flemings, Jews and so on had been tolerated only in their own compounds for hundreds of years in the Middle Ages and said that absorption into full London life took a long time. Integration (though the word was not then used except by mathematicians) must be a gradual process.

Unwin's great fear was lest the State should become the master, rather than the servant of society — and to him the danger showed itself in the State Socialism of the Left, no less than in the Militarism, Imperialism and Protectionism of the right. But he was no crude individualist. Progress consisted in what he called 'a deepening and widening of fellowship' and it was the small voluntary organisation — the family, the guild, the trade union, the church or chapel, the school, the university — that yielded the seed of society. Only when voluntary bodies became exclusive, or adopted the coercive methods of government, did he become their critic and opponent.

Unwin's view of the state — like Adam Smith's — was that its chief function was to remove impediments. His chief concern was for the independence of the working-class from which he himself had come. What this chiefly needed was to be free to shape its own destinies. 'It has hardly been sufficiently realised' he wrote 'how much the growth of trade unionism in England is due to the prevalence of *laissez-faire*... The passing of the Combination Acts, and the early prosecutions of trade unionists, should not blind us to the fact that it was the comparative freedom of England in the eighteenth century which alone made the combination of wage-earners possible'.

Unwin was a poor lecturer: the pace of his speech could not match that of his thought; but the student with a quick mind benefited greatly from listening to his discourse. He remade his lectures each year, pasting the newly-written one over last year's, which in turn had covered many predecessors, so that what he brought into the lecture room looked like sheets of cardboard. He once told me, playfully, that he liked to think of some future scholar stripping the palimpsest sheet by sheet in the hope of tracing the evolution of his thought. Vain thought! For Unwin's handwriting defied the efforts of everyone, except himself, to interpret. It was not in formal lectures or in writing or in print but in talk that his essential message was delivered. He was a brilliant conversationalist — able to hold his own in any company — and to change suddenly into the dialect when occasion called for it. He used to go to the University Library to check references and collect books every Saturday morning and I made a point of being there. He would fly about like a bird from shelf to shelf and satisfy yours, as well as his own requirements, swiftly. He was deaf and we used to walk home through the back streets which had little traffic and it was in the dismal shades of Chorlton-on-Medlock that I gained more than in any other place or from any other man.

I haven't time to do more than mention his affection and pride in his mother, who lived with him and his wife till he died. He abounded in kindness: if you were ill he came round at once: he took my tutorial class at Rochdale (I think) for several weeks. During the summer he liked to go abroad to trace the growth of continental cities and he would compare the streets he found named after early guilds and companies with the Society Street, Co-operative Street, even Divi Street, he found in his native Stockport. After a visit to Italy in shocking weather in 1924, he came back in poor shape and a serious illness developed. I went to sit by his bedside one afternoon, when Mrs Unwin had to go out. He told

me the two of them had spent the morning singing through the *Messiah* and most of the time I was there he spent in tracing for me the careers of the various members of his family since they ceased to be small farmers in East Anglia and scattered over the industrial north. Except in his own case, the story was one of decline rather than rise of status. But this did not shake Unwin's belief that on the whole the process of the Industrial Revolution had been salutary. Two or three days after my visit he died at the age of 55 — with the best part of what he had it in him to contribute to economic history unrecorded.

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In my 23 years at Manchester I met a good number of economic historians who came as visitors for short periods. But the only one I got to know well and must say a few words about was J.L. Hammond. Born in 1872, the son of a Yorkshire vicar, he was educated at Bradford Grammar School before going to Oxford where (like Tawney) he took a Second in Greats. He was greatly influenced by Gilbert Murray and his touchstone for later societies was the civilisation of ancient Greece. While still in the twenties he collaborated with Murray and F.W. Hirst in writing a book on *Liberalism and the Empire*. He was editor of *The Speaker* for six years and after that edited *The Nation*. But in 1907 he became Secretary to the Civil Service Commission — a post that allowed him sufficient leisure to write with his wife, Barbara, the first two of the famous *Labourer* series — (*The village labourer* and *The town labourer*). At the age of 40 he joined the Royal Field Artillery and served in the war but was invalided out. When the war was over he went as Special Correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian* to the Peace Conference at Paris and also reported at the Irish Peace Conference. He was thus by training a classical scholar and by vocation a journalist — in the best sense of the word. He wrote much on politics as well as on economic history. His best book, in my view, was his *Gladstone and the Irish nation* (1938), which would have been more widely known but for the date of its appearance a few months before the outbreak of the Second World War.

Hammond used to come to Manchester each summer to take charge of the *Manchester Guardian* when the editor, C.P. Scott, was away on holiday. I used to walk with him in the afternoons and I took him to see what was left of the early factories at Styal and Mellor. He was a gentle, chivalrous man and modest to a fault. When we were in

the train together one day he drew from his pocket the proof of a new preface he had written for the second edition of one of their earlier books — *The town labourer*, I think. He handed it to me for comment. I was willing to pass the statement that the industrial revolution 'led to the degradation of large masses of people' but told him I thought he was mistaken in saying it produced a substantial fall in the standard of living. Without any reply, he took a pen from his pocket and struck out the words I had objected to. I was amazed and somewhat alarmed that he should defer, without question, to the opinion of a younger and almost unknown student of his period. But he was highly sensitive to the unfair criticism their books received from some quarters. A young lady who had visited them at their home and had been given help, published in one of the *Quarterlies* an essay on the Hammond's work entitled *A socialist phantasy*. There was no opportunity to reply in print. But Hammond sent round a letter to his friends putting his case and insisting that he had never called himself a socialist. He was somewhat sore, again, when some religious devotees protested that he had not been fair to the beliefs held by Lord Shaftesbury: I thought it was an admirably sympathetic study. And yet again, he was rightly offended by a book on *Noble lord, the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury*, which contained passages — even the very words — from their own book, without acknowledgment. It was left to me to expose the plagiarism in a short review in the *Manchester Guardian*.

Hammond was a fine figure of a man. He was also a magnificent orator, as we learnt when we heard his address to an annual meeting of the W.E.A. And he was fearless in his attacks on social and political injustices. Like Tawney, he refused the public honours so many men seek.

He once told me about the way in which their books were made. He could not himself bear the tedium of close research at the Record Office. Barbara did the work of extracting their data: he did the writing. Something of the same kind existed when he was editing the *Manchester Guardian*. When I went to have tea with them in the austere rooms of a university hostel in which they lived during the Second World War, the table was cluttered with clippings from a wide range of morning papers which she went through every day, looking for bits that he might find useful when he went off at 6 o'clock to the *Guardian* office to write his leaders. She had to make the tea on the floor and there was very little to sit on — certainly no easy chair. They reminded me of two affectionate children playing house. There is much to be said for division of labour

but even when the collaborators are as close as were the Hammonds the method is not ideal for historical work: it is better if the writer has himself endured the labour of research and seen the material as a whole and not just selections from it. But perhaps it is unjust of me to say this. In recent years I have been invited more than once to criticise the Hammonds, even 'to expose' them. My interpretation of the Industrial Revolution is different from theirs but after his death Barbara wrote me and said whenever he had been asked to advise a short book on the subject he had recommended mine. The Hammonds did more than any other scholars to popularise our subject and to stress the disharmonies — which some of us have neglected or treated lightly — between economic development and social well-being.

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In 1944 I was still a Reader in Currency at Manchester and promotion seemed most unlikely. But I had been made Dean of the Faculty. I had feelings of affection for Manchester and for my colleagues in the department and was content to think I should end my working life there. But one day I went to London to examine a Ph. D. candidate with Tawney. I didn't know him at all well, and was astounded when walking back with him up Kingsway on my way to the station, he told me there was to be an appointment to the Chair left vacant when Eileen Power died and asked if I would consider it. I said firmly 'No'. I was happy at Manchester and was already 55 years old. A few weeks later he wrote me and I again refused. And then he sent me a long letter, which I still preserve, that made me change my mind.

The School of Economics did much for me. But best of all it gave me the friendship of Tawney. I have written long obituary notices of him elsewhere and am not going to repeat them now. But let me just outline the facts of his career. He was educated at Rugby, where, among other pieces of literature he became familiar with were Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* and the Bible, in which his superb style of writing was rooted. He went on to Balliol where he was not, I think, entirely happy. After taking a Second in Greats he went to Glasgow to teach economic theory — Boehm-Bawerk and Marshall (he soon found them out, he told me) — supplementing his salary of £50 a year by writing for the *Glasgow Herald* until readers offended by the irony which crept into his reports of social functions protested to the editor who (kindly though he was) suggested that Tawney might find scope for his talents elsewhere.

A few years later he was appointed one of the first two tutors of the W.E.A., taking classes at Longton and Rochdale and later producing with Brown and Bland the volume of documents for use of students of economic history. Tawney's early reputation centred on these two highly successful classes and this book. Not very long ago an external student in his answer to a question on the history of Co-operation wrote, 'We know a good deal about the Rochdale Pioneers. We even know the names of some of them: they were Bland, Brown and Tawney'.

As is well-known, Tawney joined the army in 1915 as a private in the 24th Manchesters. He would not take a commission. But when in training, contrary, needless to say, to regulations, he would walk round to the officers' quarters to talk with some who shared his interests. He has himself told, in matchless prose, the story of the action in which he was seriously wounded. But few of you will have heard of his treatment in hospital in England afterwards. He and his fellow casualties were very harshly treated by the sister in charge of them until one afternoon Bishop Temple — later Archbishop — came to see him. And when he had gone, the sister enquired indignantly of Tawney, 'Why didn't you tell us you were a gentleman?'

While he held his Readership at the School of Economics in the twenties, Tawney produced a succession of remarkable books, including *The acquisitive society* and *Religion and the rise of capitalism*, and played a large part in the volumes of *Tudor economic documents*. But all the time he continued his activities in politics, the W.E.A., the Trade Boards and the Labour movement. He served on the Samuel Coal Commission and wrote vigorous articles on needed educational reform. He liked to recall the night in 1925 when the miners' leaders were away on the coalfields and he, with a lady assistant, was left in charge of Union headquarters in London. A telephone call came through from colliers in the north enquiring whether they should go down the pits on the following shift. Tawney replied 'No', and used to claim that his answer led to the stoppage out of which grew the General Strike of 1926.

In 1931 Tawney was appointed to the Chair of Economic History which he might have had earlier if he had wished for it. It was a year that saw the collapse of Ramsay MacDonald and a split in the Labour Party. Perhaps the spectacle of so many labour men accepting honorific titles cooled Tawney's interest in political life. But he turned his attention to writing an excellent book on *Land and labour in China* and gathering together material which, long after, appeared in his masterpiece on *Business and politics under James I*.

Tawney drew his inspiration from two very different sources: Primitive Christianity and Sydney and Beatrice Webb. Christianity and Socialism must travel together: 'What is needed [he wrote in his *Commonplace Book*] is a change of principles. This is where I think the Fabians are inclined to go wrong. They seem to think you can trick statesmen into a good course of action, without changing their principles, and that by taking sufficient thought society can add several cubits to its stature. It can't, so long as it lives on the same spiritual diet. No amount of cleverness will get figs off thistles'.

His touchstone for institutions was whether or not they tended to equality. In 1912 he wrote in his scrap book: 'In the eye of learning as in the eye of God, all men are equal because all men are infinitely small. To sell education for money is the next thing to calling the gift of God money'. Hence he wanted the abolition of all fee-charging Public Schools.

I saw another side of Tawney when I shared with him and Mrs Tawney for a few days, the austerity of their cottage at Elcombe, near Stroud. (He slept on the floor in a hen-coop outside, while I, not knowing this, occupied his bed.) He took me to see the exact spot where a maiden had told him the Witan used to be held. Actually, she said, it was here that 'Alfred the Great used to feast with his Knights-of-the-Round-Table'. He took me to meet a sturdy rogue who had magnificent trees on his holding which the authorities wanted to cut down. He said he would kill the first man to touch them — and meant it. I saw a badger's hole and the stream in which Tawney used to fish for trout. And I visited the little Church where he used to take Communion, with his dog squatting at his heels. The original vicar was tolerant: he said the dog adopted a reverent attitude. But his successor objected and Tawney told me it was all he could do to restrain himself from telling the parson that the dog was a better Christian than he.

Tawney lived up to an almost impossibly high code. He spent next to nothing on food, drink or clothing, though rather more on books, subscriptions and his own special kind of herbal tobacco, more of which was spread about the floor, his trousers and his bed — I should know because I slept in it — than ever got into his pipe. He never troubled to extinguish his pipe before putting it into his pocket and twice I saw the flames rise from his coat while he was giving a lecture. He showed no concern, merely patted his pocket, observed, 'I see I burn prematurely', and continued his discourse.

He gave away freely the money that came to him — arguing that if anyone asked you for money it was a proof that he needed it more urgently than you. Once when I was to meet him in Mecklenburg

Square, he was a minute or two late. 'Sorry, my boy' he said. 'I have just been to pay a donation to the Printers' Strike fund — a mere £ 5'. This, to my knowledge, when he was himself hard-up. He was often exploited — robbed would be the better word. A man who did odd jobs in the Square told him he wanted to set up a coffee bar on one of the main roads out of the town. He needed £100. How it came about that Tawney had so much money by him I can't understand but he lent the £ 100 to the man and, of course, never saw it again.

Tawney once said that his life had been that unfortunate thing, an unplanned economy. I know of no life that, throughout, conformed more closely to the Christian principles he adopted in early manhood and was so fully fulfilled.

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A reviewer in *The Times* Saturday review recently (Dennis Potter on Michael Howard's *Lytton Strachey*, 24 Feb. 1968) remarked: 'Biography is in some ways the most brutish of all the Arts. It shifts about uncomfortably in the strangely uncertain middle ground between deliberate assassination and helpless boot-licking — two activities which are in themselves frequently interchangeable'. I hope I have avoided both extremes in this talk. What I have tried to do is to set down some details — mostly trivial — relating to four economic historians I had the fortune to know. All four were Oxford men: all divided their time between research and propaganda — to the benefit of both, I think. All used their brains in a way not all historians do. All were concerned less with the accomplishments of individuals than of social groups. All sought to penetrate below the surface of events to deeper things. Their points of view differed. Ashley was a strong believer in Tory Democracy; Unwin was concerned with the widening and deepening of Community; Hammond with the growth of humanitarianism and Liberal policy; Tawney with a Socialism inspired by Christianity. All were dedicated to teaching and all questioned established opinion. Unwin once said that the task of the University teacher was to lay on the young the burden of scepticism. If you are a good economic historian you will end as a sceptic but not, I hope, as a cynic. For all the men I have talked of had deep religious or humanist convictions and if you want to measure up to them you must find for yourself some ultimate belief or coherent system of thought.

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